



**Written Testimony  
of**

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**“Serving Students and Families through Child Nutrition Programs”**

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Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the importance of child nutrition programs for students and families. My name is Kathy Krey. I am the Director of Research at the Texas Hunger Initiative at Baylor University where I oversee a diverse portfolio of research and evaluation projects on food security topics, including evaluation of child nutrition programs in Texas. The Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) is a collaborative, capacity-building project focused on ensuring that every Texan has access to three nutritious meals a day, seven days a week. THI develops and implements strategies to end hunger through research, policy, education, community organizing and community development. Headquartered at Baylor University with 12 regional offices across the state, THI convenes federal, state and local government stakeholders with nonprofits, faith communities and business leaders to create an efficient system of accountability that increases food security in Texas.

Child nutrition programs are an important resource for lessening the effects of food insecurity in the United States. These programs include the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the at-risk afterschool meals component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) which provide meals and snacks to low-income children. These programs also include school meals offered to all children but that are particularly important for students that qualify for free and reduced-price meals based on their household income (children who live in families at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line). These child nutrition programs are instrumental in ensuring that students whose families that are economically poor have access to healthy meals throughout the year. In order to estimate need, researchers utilize free and reduced-price meal (FRP) eligibility data, which serves as a rough proxy for the number of children living in poverty because census poverty data isn't broken down by school/school district level. Fifty-one percent of U.S. public school children (Southern Education Foundation, 2015) and 61 percent of Texas public school children qualify for FRP meals (TDA, 2013-2014 NSLP Breakfast & Lunch Data). This measure is important because poverty is a strong predictor of how well children do in school, both academically and behaviorally.

To understand the larger picture, 19.5 percent of American households with children were "food insecure at least some time during the year" meaning they "had difficulty providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources," and in 9.9 percent of households with children, one or more children were food-insecure) (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh,

2014). In Texas, it is estimated that 27 percent of children live in households experiencing food insecurity, which is higher than the national average (21%) (Feeding America, 2014). THI and its partners across the state have fostered innovative public-private partnerships to maximize the reach and efficiency of child nutrition programs so that more children and families who need the programs have access to them.

### **Public-Private Partnerships**

Because public challenges, such as food insecurity, are multijurisdictional in nature, “they require a response that exceeds the capabilities and resources of any one department, organization, or jurisdiction, and collaboration, including multijurisdictional partnerships, provides a way to stretch resources, and accomplish more with less” (O’Leary & Gerard, 2013, p. 57). Benefits of public-private partnerships include “cost savings [and] enhanced quantity and quality of services” in addition to benefits for the local community such as “addressing community needs, enhancing trust between participating entities, and increasing citizen support” (Hilvert & Swindell, 2013, p. 251).

The administration and coordination of child nutrition programs present unique opportunities for public-private partnerships to take shape. Through actors such as the Texas Department of Agriculture, schools, nonprofits, congregations, and foundations, community-based resources are pooled and maximized. By stretching these resources, including funding, volunteers, space, food, and educational activities, local communities are able to accomplish more through collaboration. Most importantly, public-private partnerships decrease access barriers, encourage family and community involvement, and build the networked capacity of local communities to address the issue of food insecurity so that low-income children have access to meals year round.

### **Summer and Afterschool Meals**

The need for meals is especially high during the summer months for Texas children, when school is not in session. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), administered by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Department of Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS), is one way to ensure that children receive healthy meals during the summer. The National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option (SSO) was created as an alternative to SFSP

for schools that already participate in school meal programs and wish to continue meal service into the summer. Schools, nonprofit organizations, and local municipalities serve as summer meal sponsors and have meal sites within their region. Summer meals programs also often provide education and/or recreational activities in addition to serving meals.

In Texas, about 300,000 kids a day participate in the summer meals program (TDA, 2014 Summer Meals Data). Regular access to healthy meals in the summer months is important, not just for health but for students' academic well-being. We know that health issues and inadequate nutrition can intensify the learning loss that occurs over the summer. Students who are not engaged in learning during the summer tend to fall behind academically, especially in areas such as math and reading (Smink, 2011). This particularly affects low-income students "who lose up to twice the ground of other students" in reading and language during the summer months (Kerry & Davies, 1998, p. 119). There is still unmet need in Texas. We know that lack of awareness and transportation challenges, for example, discourage some low-income children from participating in the program. Fortunately, work is being done at the state and local level to address some of these barriers and ensure that the children who need the program have access to it.

Additionally, children can be served meals through the At-Risk Afterschool Meal Program, which is part of the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). This program reimburses certain afterschool providers for snacks or meals served to participating children. The snacks and meals are served after the regular school day ends. The afterschool meals program helps to relieve the financial burden of working parents and "provides financial support for schools and community centers that run afterschool programs, so they can provide healthy meals and additional programming" (CPPP, 2015, p. 18). An average of 51,000 meals per day were served in Texas through afterschool programs in 2014 (Afterschool Alliance, 2014).

Our in-house, on-going evaluation of the summer meals and afterschool meals programs assesses the operations of the programs and factors that affect participation. The study utilizes existing publicly available data, surveys of sponsor staff, and focus groups with parents and children. Food quality, transportation, and stigma are often cited as barriers to participation in summer meals programs, and rural areas of Texas tend to be most underserved. However, even given these barriers, there has been a steady increase in the number of summer meals sponsors

and meal sites in Texas over the last five years which will help the program reach more low-income students and reach previously underserved areas, while also building on the capacity of organizations.

THI and two of its national partners developed and administered a survey to summer meals sponsors to better understand their perspectives on how a summer meals program operates locally. Overall, Texas sponsors reported being satisfied with the summer meals program experience. However, sponsors cited transporting kids as a major obstacle. Sponsors conducted a wide number of outreach efforts, most often sending information home through schools and providing information at program sites. Most Texas sponsors operate five or fewer sites and have kept their number of sites consistent over the past year. Nonprofit sponsors are more likely than schools to report an interest in growing their programs, increasing their meal sites, and offering more meals. The partnership of community-based organizations is essential because they have established trust, networks, and resources. Barriers to participation are being addressed in Texas through innovative programming and strategic outreach.

### **School Breakfast**

In addition to summer and after school meals, school meals programs, like school breakfast, are an important component to a successful school day, especially for low-income children who might not have access to breakfast at home due to things like: two working parents with limited time, the early start to the school day, and limited food resources at home. In Texas, more than 1.8 million students start their day with school breakfast, including 1.5 million low-income students (TDA, 2013-2014 NSLP Lunch & Breakfast Data).

The research is clear: eating breakfast is associated with positive student outcomes, including improved attention and memory and decreased disciplinary action (Ingwersen et al., 2007; Mahoney et al., 2005; Wesnes et al., 2003, Murphy et al., 1998, Terry & Kerry, 2000). School meals offer all students better opportunities to succeed in school, especially children at risk of missing meals at home.

### **Public-Private Partnership Case Examples**

We have seen improvement in programming for summer meals, afterschool meals, and school breakfast because of the partnerships among schools, nonprofits, foundations that

supplement and maximize federal funding and state administration of the programs. The following are case examples of public-private partnerships for child nutrition program efficiency in Texas.

### **Mobile Summer Meals Bus and Afterschool Meals Program: Waco, TX**

In Waco, Texas, the Texas Hunger Initiative collaborated with the City of Waco and Greater Harvest Assembly Church of God in Christ to increase access to summer and afterschool meals in the local area, utilizing SFSP and CACFP. The three groups received a grant from the National League of Cities to provide funding for the programs. Waco Independent School District and CitySquare, a privately funded nonprofit, served as the sponsors for each program. This public-private partnership also pioneered a mobile summer meals program, The “Meals on the Bus” program, in collaboration with Waco ISD, added 10 new summer meals sites in the Waco area. CitySquare sponsored 12 additional summer meals sites last summer, and 17 sites now serve afterschool meals, and all of these in previously underserved areas. This collaboration eliminated transportation barriers for both the summer meals and afterschool meals program.

### **Community-Based, Extra-Curricular Summer Meals Program: Rio Grande Valley, Texas**

In South Texas, the Rio Grande Valley, Catholic Charities sponsors 75 summer meals sites and teams up with other local nonprofit organizations, including ARISE. Catholic Charities utilizes federal funding from SFSP and collaborate with churches and nonprofits to recruit and support summer meals sites. The first year, they had several churches utilizing the summer meals program for their week-long Vacation Bible Schools. The next year, Catholic Charities asked several of these churches to consider extending their week-long service. That summer, 10 churches served meals at least one month and some even served the entire summer. In addition to providing summer meals, ARISE provides classes for adults during the summer, and FirstBook, a national nonprofit, provides books for educational programming at the summer meals site. The churches and nonprofits coordinate their efforts by sharing volunteers, serving meals, and providing activities with the children and their families.

### **A Farmers' Market and Summer Meals Program Collaboration: Tyler, Texas**

In Tyler, Texas, the East Texas Community Food Coalition and THI partnered to redistribute excess food from the market to summer meals sites. The farmers donated the extra produce that was not sold at the market to families who could use it via parents whose children attended the summer meals sites. The program provided an avenue for children to try new foods and education on healthy eating habits. Several summer meals sites now incorporate cooking lessons for the activity portion of the program and bring in nutritionists to educate children and families about healthy eating. The group has also incorporated other programming for families such as job training and ideas on how to eat healthy with a limited budget. Partnerships are linking families with existing services in the community to improve quality of life beyond meeting the need for meals. The East Texas Community Food Coalition, THI and the farmers around Tyler, Texas, are excited to maximize the impact of the program next summer. Their goal is to collect all of the leftover produce and distribute it at sites in each of the eight food deserts in Tyler.

### **A Congregation-led Summer Meals Program: Lockhart, Texas**

In Lockhart, Texas, a pastor stumbled into the summer meals program. After learning more about THI and how his church could get involved, the pastor organized a meeting in his small, community. After administering a community assessment, revealing the high needs of the community, the faith-based community stepped up to form a THI-supported anti-hunger coalition. The coalition is run by Caldwell County Christian ministries which secure volunteers to run every summer meals site. Representatives from multiple congregations, such as First Baptist Lockhart Church and the Church of Christ, sit together on the coalition and plan for summer meals every year by utilizing SFSP. Lockhart ISD serves as the sponsor to provide all the meals. In 2012, Lockhart opened two sites. In 2013, they reached other underserved areas through three additional sites and in 2014 it had five different sites, a slow and steady improvement in a small community.

### **Conclusion**

Child nutrition programs are necessary to curb the effects of food insecurity. Public-private partnerships bridge local, state, and federal resources to maximize the efficiency and

reach of these programs. Innovative collaborations increase the capacity of communities to take ownership of their needs so that children can stay fueled for learning all day, all year round.

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